

16. BLACKNECKED GREBE (*PODICEPS NIGRICOLLIS*
BREHM) IN BHAVNAGAR

During my bird watching visits to the Ruvapari Tanks and sewage waters only a mile away from Bhavnagar, I came across the Blacknecked Grebe on 7th November 1951. The bird looked so different from the common little grebes or dabchicks that I took a few cine shots of it before collecting the specimen. It was a male in winter plumage.

I believe this to be the first instance of its being recorded in Saurashtra.

BHAVNAGAR,
December 4, 1951.

K. S. DHARMAKUMARSINHJI

[Identification of the specimen has been confirmed.—Eds.]

17. SOME BIRD NOTES FROM JASDAN, SAURASHTRA

On the 12th November 1951 I had been to a lake some 15 miles from Jasdán where I was surprised to see a Great Crested Grebe, (*Podiceps cristatus cristatus*) in winter plumage. M. K. S. Dharmakumarsinhji who was with me confirmed the identification. This bird is a very rare straggler to these parts having been previously recorded in Bhavnagar and Kharaghoda.

Another rare winter straggler seen by us was the Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) four birds among grazing cattle on the lake side. They were all collected and have been sent for identification as to the subspecies.

JASDAN,
December 3, 1951.

Y. S. SHIVRAJKUMAR

[Apparently *S. v. pollaratskyi* Finsch. In the B.N.H.S. collection we have two specimens of this race collected by the Gujarat Ornithological Survey at Saiat (Kaira District), December 1945.—Eds.]

18. MORE STRAY BIRD NOTES FROM MALABAR

I. CUCKOO CHICK FOSTERED ON KING CROWS

On the 30th of May, 1951, I came across a pair of King Crows (*Dicrurus macrocerus*) which were feeding a fully-fledged cuckoo chick. The chick flew from tree to tree when I attempted to catch it, while the king crows, though agitated, kept at a distance. I left the chick finally on a tree more than 100 yards away from its original perch. The next evening the chick was found once again on the very same twig where it had been first found, and the king crows were observed feeding it often. When the 'gunman', who had agreed to shoot the chick for me, and I were standing under the tree, one of the king crows flew past the chick, uttering short, sharp notes, whereupon the chick left its perch and followed the foster-parent to a distant tree. Now and then one or both drongos bullied the crows and a Crested Serpent-eagle which flew over us.

After shooting of the chick it was found that the king crows left the area—where they had been the most conspicuous birds—entirely.

To the best of my knowledge, we have four parasitic cuckoos with us in spring: the Koel (numerous); the Common Hawk Cuckoo (common); the Plaintive Cuckoo (never more than two or three); and the Indian Cuckoo (uncommon—never more than half a dozen).

2. THE BREEDING OF THE LITTLE RING PLOVER (*Charadrius dubius*)

In the latest authoritative account of the birds of the west coast, Mr. Sálím Ali's 'Ornithology of Travancore and Cochin' (*J.B.N.H.S.* 39; 581), it is said of Jerdon's Little Ring Plover: 'No specific instance of its breeding in Travancore and Cochin has hitherto been recorded'. As this seems to be true of Malabar also, it may be worth while placing on record that this Ring Plover breeds regularly in numbers in the rivers of the Palghat taluk from December to June. In Kavasseri, on the bed of the river Gayatri, at least 29 times they have nested between April 1943 and June 1951.

March, April and May seem to be the months when the majority have nests. Four times nests were found in December: Dec. 27, 1948, c/2; Dec. 28, 1948, c/2; Dec. 19, 1949, c/2; Dec. 20, 1950, c/1.

The usual number of eggs in a full clutch is three; I have never found one of four.

The birds which nest late in May always stand a serious risk of having their eggs or chicks washed away by monsoon floods. This year for instance, on June 3, there were three pairs of Ring Plover in the river, each with a family of chicks. One pair had 3 chicks, another had 1, and the third had an egg and a newly hatched chick. On June 4 this last egg also hatched. On the 11th the river was in spate and the chicks undoubtedly perished. Two pairs out of the three disappeared at this time, the third pair remaining with us till about 20th June, and resorting to the grassy banks, laterite flats and the marshy paddy fields for their food.

Throughout the month of May this year I had wandered about on the river bed noting that there were three pairs of Ring Plovers, and confident that only one of these had a nest (May, 28 c/2). On June 3 I was on the river bed, in heavy rain which a strong wind was driving almost through me. A Ring Plover was found brooding over, what I thought must be eggs. Though its mate was uttering warning calls this bird got up and ran away only after I had gone very near it. When it got up, three tiny chicks ran away from the shelter of its wings and fluffed-out breast feathers. The moment I walked off the parent got the chicks safely tucked up under it once more.

Some 150 yards away yet another Ring Plover was sheltering a single chick in the same way. Another 150 yards, and I came across the pair whose nest I had found on May 28. Here it looked as though one bird was sitting on an egg and the other protecting a chick from the rain. On June 5 also the birds were found protecting their brood in this fashion.

3. THE BREEDING SEASON OF THE BLACKHEADED ORIOLE (*Oriolus xanthornus*)

The Blackheaded Oriole is said to breed from February to July, but on the September 24, 1950, I discovered a pair feeding two chicks in a nest on a mango tree. On the 25th the chicks were still being fed. On the 27th the nest was found torn to pieces, by some predatory bird most probably.

4. PARADISE FLYCATCHER (*Tchitreia paradisi*)

The last date on which a Paradise Flycatcher was seen in the plains this year (1951) was April 24 (Olavakkode). Throughout April the birds were found to be rare and had to be carefully looked for. On May 15 I was at Padagiri (Nelliampathy hills) for a few hours, and was surprised to find a Paradise Flycatcher of uncertain sex at the edge of a forest by the roadside. I watched the bird for a long time through fieldglasses.

In view of the fact that Mr. C. R. Stonor repeats (*J.B.N.H.S.* 46; 118-125) Kinloch's statement that white males were found predominant on the hills, it may be interesting to know that in the plains of the Palghat Gap white males as well as chestnut males with streamers are rare at all times, though birds whose sex cannot be distinguished in the field are very common. Mr. Salim Ali does not tell us (*J.B.N.H.S.* 38; 303) whether he found white males more common than the others in the Nelliampathies, but states that at Nemmara, 'Red plumaged males and females were common, but white males exceedingly rare.' My experience suggests that white males, when with us, prefer jungles and forests where they have more cover, whereas the birds of 'uncertain' sex frequent the more open jungles, gardens etc. Is it not probable that this may have something to do with the white males' greater need for protection? If within their breeding range, the white males also are found to frequent inhabited areas and open countryside, it may be due to the boldness that breeding birds invariably display. Night Herons, for instance, fearlessly go about collecting nesting material even at noon during the breeding season, whereas, at other times, they hide very carefully throughout the day in thick foliage.

5. THE COMMON GREY HORNBILL (*Tockus birostris*)

In 'The Ornithology of Travancore and Cochin' (*J.B.N.H.S.* 39; 21-23) only three hornbills are listed as occurring in those states. In Kavasseri, which is close to Nemmara, one of the collecting camps of the Survey, the resident breeding hornbill is the Common Grey Hornbill. The Pied Hornbill, the only other hornbill of our place, is just an occasional visitor during the monsoon months. It would be most surprising if the Common Grey Hornbill were found to be totally absent at least in that part of Cochin State which lies in the Palghat Gap.

6. THE SOUTHERN GREYBACKED SHRIKE (*Lanius schach caniceps* BLYTH) AS A MIMIC

It is well known that the Rufousbacked and Greybacked shrikes are expert mimics. But, unfortunately, they seem to be rarely disposed

to give performances. Of the many Greybacked shrikes I have known, only one indulged in mimicry, and that too only on three evenings. But this bird displayed real taste in the call notes it chose to mimic. Within half an hour it gave excellent renderings of the notes of some fourteen different birds. Almost every bird which has an interesting call or song was included, e.g. the Common Hawk Cuckoo, the Red-wattled Lapwing, the Whitebrowed Fantail Flycatcher, the Indian Nightjar, the Plaintive Cuckoo and the Whitebreasted Kingfisher. Every time the Hawk Cuckoo's 'pipeeah' notes were uttered they were either preceded or succeeded by the 'teeti-teeti-teeti' preface which the Hawk Cuckoo itself very often does not utter. In the case of the Redwattled Lapwing, the 'Did you do it' call was invariably preceded by the 'trick . . . trick . . . trick'. When taking off the Whitebreasted Kingfisher, the shrike faithfully reproduced the first notes which sound like a stammerer's efforts to commence a sentence.

As no other avian mimic has such an astonishing repertoire, it is a pity that the shrikes do not give more frequent performances.

7. A GREYBACKED SHRIKE USING LARDERING TACTICS TO TACKLE NEEM FRUITS.

In a thin teak jungle bordering on cultivated land and scrub, a pair of Greybacked Shrikes (*Lanius schach caniceps* Blyth, most probably) has been found every summer for the past seven years. This year, in the first week of June, they were found feeding two full-grown chicks which must have left the nest many days ago. On June 15, when I could no longer distinguish between adult and young, one of these birds was observed eating a ripe neem fruit in an interesting fashion.

The shrike picked up a fruit from the ground, hopped on to a thin, low bush and very dexterously, with a sudden downward sweep of the bill, impaled the fruit on a dry, upstanding twig. Then it peeled and ate the fruit bit by bit, slowly turning the fruit about. Now and then the fruit fell off and the bird had to jump down, retrieve it and refix it. Once it wasted a couple of minutes vainly trying to fix a fruit on a twig which was green and still had leaves on it. Every time the bird tried jabbing the fruit on the twig, the fruit fell off and had to be fetched from the ground. After a time, the bird hopped back to the first twig and succeeded in its very first attempt to get the fruit fixed satisfactorily.

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PALGHAT, MALABAR.

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19. FURTHER NOTES ON THE BIRDS OF THE NEPAL VALLEY

Sitta himalayensis: Whitetailed Nuthatch.

A nest found at 8,000 ft. on Phulchok ridge on February 25. It was about 5 ft. from the ground in a rhododendron tree. Both birds were carrying nesting material into the hole which was built up with white mud. On April 8 both parents were feeding young which appeared well feathered when I flashed a torch into the nest hole.